

State OKs I-84 Widening

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Transportation: Officials lay out plans to add third lane in each direction from Nampa to Meridian by 2011.

CANYON COUNTY — Plans to widen Interstate 84 to make the daily commute easier in Canyon County moved from vision to reality Wednesday.

The Idaho Transportation Board approved seven specific projects stretching from Nampa to Meridian to begin an extensive long-term reconstruction of the often-congested freeway. The I-84 work is among almost \$1 billion in specially bonded highway projects the state will take on though 2011.

The work is slated to widen I-84 from Franklin Boulevard in Nampa through Meridian Road to three lanes by the end of 2010. However, because of sharply rising construction costs, state officials said work to widen the freeway from Caldwell to Nampa will have to come later.

Here are the local projects approved Wednesday:

- Complete the design, right-of-way purchase and construction of the Ten Mile Interchange — scheduled for 2008.
- Widen the Eagle Road westbound off-ramp — scheduled for 2007.
- Complete preliminary design and environmental study for the long-term vision of I-84 from Five Mile Road to the junction of Idaho 44
- Complete the design, environmental study and construct a third lane on each side of I-84 from the Garrity Interchange to the Meridian Interchange — scheduled for 2007.
- Replace existing overpasses at Black Cat Road and Robinson Road — scheduled for 2008.
- Complete design, environmental study and construct a third lane on each side of I-84 from the Franklin Interchange to the Garrity Interchange — scheduled for 2010.
- Widen the Garrity Interchange I-84 bridges to allow for the third lane addition both east and westbound — scheduled 2010.

Board OKs \$998 Million Road Plan

Idaho Press-Tribune Staff

Getting there: Transportation officials adopt proposal to improve I-84 among many statewide projects.

BOISE — Traveling around Idaho will get easier in the next five years — but not as easy as former Gov. Dirk Kempthorne once envisioned.

Wednesday, the Idaho Transportation Board approved a plan to spend \$998 million to improve highway corridors statewide.

The Idaho Legislature authorized the board to finance the Connecting Idaho highway improvements by borrowing against future federal funds allocated to the state.

In May, Idaho sold \$200 million in bonds to finance the first phase. The plan now calls for the state to issue nearly \$800 million in bonds and interest earnings in allotments of about \$200 million during the next four years.

Among the projects approved in the plan: widening Interstate 84 to six lanes between Nampa and Meridian.

“This investment will dramatically improve safety, reduce congestion and create jobs,” Transportation Board Chairman Frank Bruneel said. “The plan addresses the most immediate needs on each of the corridors while keeping within the budget we have.”

The largest single component of the Connecting Idaho plan involves Interstate 84 in the Treasure Valley. Other highway projects in the plan would:

- Widen and build new interchange on U.S. Highway 95 between Hayden and Sagle.
- Reconstruct U.S. 95 north of Worley to a four-lane divided highway and add an interchange.
- Complete preliminary engineering and environmental study to extend Idaho 16 from Idaho 44 to I-84.
- Widen U.S. 30 from McCammon to Lava Hot Springs and make bridge improvements.
- Complete Twin Falls Alternate Route.

Officials had to scale back the work from the initial Connecting Idaho proposal Kempthorne presented to lawmakers last year. That's because construction costs have skyrocketed in the past two years.

"We had to make some difficult tradeoffs and reduce the scope of the projects," Bruneel said. "Soaring construction and land costs have limited what we can do. But we are still addressing the most important and needed elements of the projects."

Nationally, state officials said, the cost of asphalt jumped 71 percent from August 2005 to August 2006. Costs for concrete, steel, fuel and other construction materials increased dramatically as well.

"With runaway inflation eroding our buying power, it makes more sense than ever to use bonding as a tool," Bruneel said. "We can beat inflation, get more for our money and drive on the improvements now while paying a low interest rate."

I-84 work in Boise

In addition to the projects to improve Interstate 84 from Canyon County to Meridian, several projects will take place on the freeway from Orchard Street to the Issacs Canyon Interchange in Boise.

Those projects are planned to:

- Construct sound walls along I-84 from Cole Road to Broadway Avenue — 2008.
- Resurface the existing two lanes along I-84 from east of Cole Road to Isaacs Canyon — 2007.
- Construct a third eastbound and westbound lane on I-84 from east of Cole Road to Broadway Avenue — 2009.
- Reconstruct the Orchard Street Interchange — 2009.
- Reconstruct the Vista Avenue Interchange — 2011